

# **WILSON'S CREEK NATIONAL BATTLEFIELD**

## **General Management Plan Newsletter • Number 1**

### **October 1999**

#### **PARK AND PUBLIC MEETING WORKSHOP NOTES**

This newsletter is our pledge to the friends and supporters of Wilson's Creek National Battlefield to keep you informed about the general management plan (GMP) process. The GMP is the first phase of tiered planning and decision making in the National Park Service. The purpose is to ensure that each park has a clearly defined direction for resource preservation and visitor use. A park's general management plan guides the management, visitor use, development, and interpretation for a 15-20 year period.

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield (NB) is a nationally significant historic resource. The story interpreted here belongs to all Americans, but the park is especially important to its neighbors, residents of Springfield area and southwest Missouri. The National Park Service (NPS) has started to prepare a general management plan (GMP) to guide park management for the next 15 to 20 years. The entire process will be completed by the fall of 2001. A small group of planning professionals are assisting the staff of Wilson's Creek NB and the public in identifying major issues facing the park, developing alternative solutions to those issues, and formulating a vision for the park's future.

Since May the planning team has held two public meetings, met with over 30 members of nearby communities and organizations, and solicited recommendations from resource experts. The goals of this first round of meetings were to: inform the public of the purpose of a GMP; explain the process we must go through to complete one; get your input on what you think the purpose of the park is; discuss with local governments and organizations activities that could impact the park in the future; identify opportunities for cooperative regional planning; and solicit recommendations on the management of park resources from a group of recognized experts.

The two public meetings were advertised in local newspapers, covered by local television and radio stations, and were published in the Federal Register. In addition, invitations to participate were mailed to over 100 members of the public and community leaders. The 1st public meeting was held at the battlefield and 34 people were in attendance. The 2nd public meeting was held in Springfield and nine people were in attendance. A potential cooperator's meeting was also held and out of 12 organizations invited 18 people attended. A series of stakeholder meetings were also held and out of 42 organizations invited 13 people attended. Finally, August 11th and 12th a group of resource experts were invited to a meeting with the planning team to gather information on park resources from experts whose expertise is not represented either on the GMP planning team or on the park staff.

#### **PARK STAFF WORKSHOPS**

The first step in this planning process involved the park staff reviewing Wilson Creek's legislative mandate, mission, purpose and significance. These topics form the foundation of the park's management strategies so it is crucial for all involved in the planning process to understand these basics and reach consensus on how they are ultimately stated in the GMP.

The second step in this process involved a discussion of individuals' dreams and nightmares regarding the park's future. This group exercise is a preliminary step in identifying the park's resource management, operational, and development issues as well as the management objectives and goals, or desired futures, the conditions to strive for during the next 15-20 years.

During the work sessions the park staff worked with the planners to refine the park's mission, purpose, and significance. The results follow:

## **Mission Statement**

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield provides for public enjoyment and appreciation of one of the first major battlefields of the Civil War by preserving unimpaired the park's cultural and natural resources and interpreting its historical significance.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of Wilson's Creek NB is to preserve and commemorate the Battle of Wilson's Creek.

## **Significance**

Wilson's Creek National Battlefield is significant as the site of the first major battle west of the Mississippi River. It is also significant as the site of the death of General Nathaniel Lyon, the first Union General killed in the Civil War. Lyon's death focused national attention on the potential loss of Missouri to the Confederacy. Finally, Wilson's Creek retains unusually high integrity relative to other Civil War battlefields.

After identifying the park's mission, purpose, and significance, the staff expressed their hopes and fears for the park's future. Their nightmares ranged from fears of overuse and inappropriate use of the park to concerns about encroaching development and inaccurate interpretation of the park's history.

In their dreams for the park's future, the staff envisioned restoring the battlefield to its 1861 appearance, protecting park resources and the visitor experience as the region develops, stimulating visitors with compelling interpretive programs that involved all the park's staff, and creating partnerships with nearby communities.

Park staff and professional planners examined the issues facing the park and discussed desired futures, the management objectives the park should pursue. Park employees raised a number of pressing issues. These included: the ongoing efforts to restore the landscape, particularly those sites key to the outcome of the battle; on-site interpretation; cultural and natural resource management, including rare and endangered species, and the impact of suburban development on scenic values, water quality, and the integrity of the visitor experience.

The desired futures listed closely paralleled the dreams previously expressed. These were: restoration of the battlefield; merging cultural and natural resource management at Bloody Hill; improving Wilson Creek's water quality; forging partnerships with neighboring landowners; devising strategies for managing historic structures; and working with local officials and groups to develop recreational alternatives to Wilson's Creek. Other objectives included buffering the park from scenic and noise intrusions as a result of highway improvements, and moving the power line that currently bisects the park.

## **PUBLIC MEETINGS**

Park staff and other NPS professionals can not undertake these planning tasks alone. No park plan can, or should, be prepared without the assistance of the public that owns and uses the park to be directly involved in the planning process. Thus park staff and professional planners conducted workshops in which they solicited ideas and concerns from private citizens, parks users, nearby landowners, and city and county officials. The information gathered in these work groups will help shape alternative concepts for future park management.

Park staff and professional planners held the first public meeting on Tuesday evening, May 25. Approximately 34 surrounding landowners and park users attended to share their thoughts on the park's purpose and significance, as well as their own nightmares and dreams for Wilson's Creek's future.

While those at the meeting expressed a diverse array of opinions about the purposes and uses for the park, there was consensus on the park's primary purpose to commemorate the history and preserve the site of the battle of Wilson's Creek. While many users spoke of the park's value as a recreational resource for equestrians, runners, walkers, and bicyclists, others reminded the group that those uses were peripheral to the park's purpose; and that park management allowed these uses, but had no mandate to do so.

The enthusiastic group acknowledged that the park's function and relationship with the surrounding communities had evolved over time and that this fact had to play a significant role in guiding the planning process. Many of their nightmares related to potential limitations on informal uses, such as horseback riding, that had grown in popularity over the last several years. These users feared that the park could be closed to them, and they would lose the only public land suitable for riding in the Springfield vicinity. Park management assured them that there was no intention to bar them from the park. There was general agreement that horseback riding raised many issues that must be addressed in the planning process. The riders voiced their commitment to paying higher user fees if it meant keeping access to Wilson's Creek.

In discussing Wilson's Creek's changing role in the local community, some of the participants pushed for its continued use as a safe and accessible recreation site for women and families. They argued that this use of the park did not have to pose a conflict with the park's purpose. Another speaker pointed out that conflicts among visitors did not have to occur; the park was big and diverse enough to accommodate all users.

The participants in the public meeting shared many of the interests that the park staff had expressed earlier. They wanted to see the history of Wilson's Creek NB preserved and accurately interpreted in ways that would inform and inspire visitors. Some users expressed hopes that reenactments would be allowed in the park. Others suggested programs that would be compatible with the park's purpose and help hikers, bikers, and horse riders learn more about the park's significance.

The meeting participants recognized that as the cities of Springfield and Republic planned for continued growth, they would inevitably focus on Wilson's Creek as an important contributor to the region's quality of life. The audience urged that the park prepare for increased pressure and demands for access. The park staff responded that one of the purposes of the GMP process was precisely that--to anticipate and plan for the park's future needs. The public shared many of the park staff's hopes for Wilson's Creek future. They wanted to see improvements in interpretation, the restoration of the battlefield to its 1861 appearance, greater community involvement and volunteer efforts, and linkages to other regional Civil War sites. Others pushed for a greater academic role for the park through the enlargement and enhancement of the research facilities. Others urged the acquisition of additional lands adjacent to the park, should they become available. The two words that were mentioned most often in this discussion were preservation and commemoration.

The park staff and professional planners held a second public meeting in Springfield at the Busch municipal building on Wednesday evening. Although only nine people were in attendance, the participants at this meeting echoed many of the interests and concerns voiced in earlier sessions, but offered several new perspectives. These included suggestions to restore the town of Wilson's Creek, to focus on historical interpretation by limiting jogging to the park's outer perimeter, to showcase the park as a catalyst for economic development and cultural tourism, to establish a research endowment, and to forge closer ties with local colleges.

## **POTENTIAL COOPERATORS MEETING**

Planners and representatives of the park staff met with a group of 18 potential cooperators that have previously expressed an interest in cooperative planning. This group consisted of planners, city administrators, County officials, and State administrators from Springfield, Republic, Jefferson City, and Greene and Christian counties. The purpose of this meeting was to inform potential cooperators of the GMP process, identify major issues facing the park, and look for opportunities for cooperative planning. In expressing their views on the park's purpose and significance these officials echoed the sentiments of park staff, landowners, and visitors. They expressed that the primary purpose of the park is to commemorate and preserve the site of the battle of Wilson's Creek.

They also discussed the park's value as a community and regional asset that enhanced economic development, regional tourism, and provided a much-needed recreation outlet for local residents. These officials urged close coordination between the park and their entities in future planning efforts and encouraged all involved in regional planning to consider alternate methods of guiding development and planning for additional green space and recreational opportunities.

These officials expressed a future vision for the park that had much in common with the vision statements articulated in earlier meetings. Their hopes included the restoration of the battlefield to its 1861 appearance; the

limitation of modern intrusions on the historic scene; enhanced interpretation; the development of a research facility with a Civil War era focus; and developing alternative recreational opportunities outside the battlefield.

## **STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS**

Over 42 organizations that have expressed an interest in the battlefield were invited to a series of individual meetings with park staff and professional planners. A total of 13 persons attended stakeholder meetings. This group consisted of City administrators, administrators of greenway trails, friends groups, special interest groups, and State and local Highway Departments. The purpose of these meetings was to inform organizations of the GMP process and get their input on how their activities might impact the park in the future. This group expressed views ranging from keeping horse use in the park, to moving power lines, erecting flags to mark battle lines, and cooperating on planning efforts for Greenway trails, State roads, and County roads.

## **RESOURCE EXPERTS**

August 11th and 12th a group of resource experts were invited to a meeting with park staff and professional planners. The purpose of the meeting was to gather information on park resources from experts whose expertise is not represented either on the GMP planning team or on the park staff. Ed Bearss is the former Chief Historian for the National Park Service, and author of the first Historic Resources Study of the Battle of Wilson's Creek. Mr. Bearss presented information on the historic resources in the park from the NPS professional historian's perspective. Dr. Bill Piston is a professor at Southwest Missouri State University, and co-author of an upcoming book on the battle of Wilson's Creek. Mr. Piston provided information on the historic resources in the park from the academic professional historian's perspective. Dr. Doug Scott is an archeologist with the Midwest Archeological Center (MWAC), and co-author of a book on archeology at Little Bighorn National Monument. Mr. Scott provided information on archeological resources in the park. Al O'Bright is a historic architect for the NPS, and was the project leader for the restoration of the Ray House. Mr. O'Bright provided information on historic structures in the park. Dr. Tom Aley is a hydrologist with Ozark Underground Laboratories, and co-author of a hydrology study done at the battlefield in the late 1980's. Mr. Aley provided information on the water resources in the park how they are related to development. Mike Debacker is a botanist with the NPS Long Term Ecological Monitoring Program. Mr. Debacker presented information on rare and endangered species and vegetative restoration efforts at the battlefield. Carolyn Wallingford is a professional curator with the NPS and presented information on collections management. Brian Olson is a safety engineer for the NPS and presented information on structural fire protection. Dorothy Anderson and Jerrilyn Thompson are social scientists from the University of Minnesota. They gathered information in preparation for a visitor use study that will provide information on visitors for the GMP. Resource experts expressed the following observations:

- The rapid development of the region has an influence on the park resources and visitor experience. As development marches across the landscape park staff should work proactively with the planning departments of State and local governments, the landowners association, and the public to make sure park resources and the visitor experience are preserved.
- Heritage Tourism will be extremely important in the future. Pea Ridge, Fort Smith, Wilson's Creek, and Fort Scott interpret the same period of American History. Heritage tourism allows the public to learn about the Civil War in the entire Trans Mississippi region and does not dilute the story of Wilson's Creek.
- The park's relationship with Wilson's Creek Battlefield Foundation is very important and staff should work to cultivate it in the future.
- The Civil War library is an important resource that any University would be proud to manage.
- The park is unique because it contains the three primary resources necessary for preserving the history and teaching the public about the Battle. These resources are; the setting or the ground the battle took place on, the material culture or the artifacts from the battle, and the written word or the diaries and other written works contained in the library. All three of these resources should be given equal management attention.
- The park is like a time machine. It is one of the few Battlefields that visitors can come to and be transported back in time.
- Current park boundaries contain 65-80% of the grounds the battle took place on, only Pea Ridge has a higher percentage.

- Landscape restoration priorities were recommended. Areas around Bloody Hill, the Short Farm, and Gibson Mill were discussed as priority areas.
- A suggestion was made to realign trails along historic road traces.
- Everything but the battle itself (troop positions) has been archeologically investigated. A park-wide archeological inventory to locate prehistoric and historic resources was recommended.
- *Lesquerella filiformis* is a Federally endangered plant species that is proposed for down-listing to threatened. It is unlikely it will ever be completely down-listed because of its limited distribution. There are 5 populations in the park, all on limestone glades. In order to effectively manage *Lesquerella filiformis* you have to manage for a diverse habitat.
- Exotic species are the biggest threat to glade habitat within the park.
- Encroachment by a native species is the second biggest threat to glade habitat. Eastern Red Cedar trees encroach on this habitat in the absence of fire.
- Park staff should provide long-term plans for housing the archeological collections now housed at MWAC.
- Park staff should provide long-term plans for installing fixed fire protection systems (sprinklers) in all structures.

## CONCLUSION

Public input is critical to the success of the National Park Service's general management planning process. Thanks to the many park users, landowners, local officials, and park users who participated in the first round of meetings, the planning for Wilson's Creek is off to the best possible start.

In the next few months park staff will work with professional planners to develop a set of draft alternatives for the GMP. After a period of internal review these alternatives will be packaged into a draft GMP/Environmental Impact Statement. The public will have an opportunity to provide input on this product during a second set of public meetings. A formal review period of 60 days will allow ample time for public comment on this document. For more information you may contact Ron Miller, the Acting Superintendent at 417-732-2662, or Gary Sullivan, the Chief of Resources Management at 417-882-9144.